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JAB-O-METER — TAKE YOUR SHOT
September 22: 84,98,274 doses
September 23: 85,26,432 doses
TOTAL DOSES: 84,98,21,108

NATIONWIDE	SEPT 22	SEPT 23
Fresh cases	26,964	31,923
Recoveries	34,167	31,990
Deaths	383	282

KARNATAKA	SEPT 22	SEPT 23
Fresh cases	847	836
Recoveries	946	852
Deaths	20	15

JABS AT HOME FOR PEOPLE WITH RESTRICTED MOBILITY, DISABILITY

The Centre announced the decision on a day it said 66% of the country's adult population has been given at least one dose

SUICIDE VICTIMS' KIN ENTITLED TO EX-GRATIA

The Centre also informed the Supreme Court that the family members of people who die by suicide within 30 days of testing Covid positive are also entitled to compensation from the State Disaster Relief Fund. Earlier, the ex-gratia of ₹50,000 was limited to Covid deaths, which were defined as death in hospital or elsewhere within 30 days of contracting the infection

UK HAS NO ISSUES WITH CoWIN, TOO

- A day after indicating that CoWIN app is the sticking point in certification of Indian vaccination to avoid quarantine, the UK shifted its position, saying the app was not a problem
- No concerns on certification were raised in Thursday's talks, UK High Commissioner said. Yet, the issue is to be fully resolved

23%
OF INDIAN ADULT POPULATION HAS RECEIVED BOTH THE DOSES

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by members of Indian Diaspora upon his arrival in Washington DC on Thursday | PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU

Modi woos business czars in the US

Seeks fresh US investments in India; deals on military drones, 5G and solar power expected

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday hit the ground running, holding back-to-back meetings with the top executives of five leading US companies from diverse sectors. Among the CEOs who met Modi in Washington DC the first day of his four-day US visit were Indian-Americans Shantanu Narayen, chairman of software major Adobe, and Vivek Lall, CEO of military drone manufacturer General Atomics. The others included Cristiano Amon of Qualcomm, a leader in 5G solutions; Mark Widmar, CEO of solar panel maker First Solar; and Stephen Schwarzman of global investment firm Blackstone.

During the one-on-one meetings with the business leaders, Modi highlighted the unique opportunities India could offer to them, sources said.

Modi's first interaction was with Qualcomm's Amon and the discussion was on how 5G technology could be accelerated. "We talked about an incredible opportunity to advance the industry not only domestically in India but India as an export of technology," Amon later said. According to the PMO, the Qualcomm CEO "expressed keenness to work with India in areas such as 5G and other @ DigitalIndia efforts". Sources said Qualcomm wants to work with India on semi-conductors, 5G and the Prime Minister Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI) scheme.

Talks with Adobe's Narayen revolved around the firm's future investment plans in India. "Ideas to leverage Digital India flagship programme in sectors like health, education and R&D were also discussed," said the Ministry of External Affairs.

Blackstone to invest $40 billion in India over 5 yrs

India is Blackstone's best market in the world, said the firm's CEO Stephen Schwarzman. He said Blackstone has already invested $60 billion in assets in India and will pump in another $40 billion over the next five years

India's solar energy potential was the focus of Modi's meeting with First Solar's Widmar. "Discussions took place about First Solar's interest in setting up manufacturing facilities in India using their unique thin-film technology," MEA said.

Modi's meeting with Lall of General Atomics, one of the world's leading manufacturers of military drones, came amid New Delhi's plan to boost its defence arsenal. The two spoke about advancing defence manufacturing, use of emerging technologies and augmenting capacity building in India.

Apple CEO Tim Cook was conspicuous by his absence. He was reportedly scheduled to meet Modi on Thursday.

Snoopgate: SC to set up technical experts' panel on Pegasus

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Thursday said it is planning to set up a committee of technical experts to look into allegations of unauthorised surveillance using Pegasus software, adding a formal order will be issued by next week.

The information assumes significance since the Centre had earlier offered to set up an expert panel on its own to look into allegations of snooping on civil society.

Chief Justice of India N V Ramana said the matter was taking time because some of the experts it wanted to induct had declined citing personal difficulties. "We will be able to finalise the members of the technical expert team by next week and then pronounce our orders." The remarks came when he was hearing some other case in which senior advocate C U Singh, one of the petitioner's lawyers in the Peagsus case, was appearing.

The SC had on September 13 reserved its order, saying it only wanted to know whether or not the Centre illegally used Pegasus to snoop on journalists, activists and politicians. The Centre had stoutly refused to file an detailed affidavit citing national security.

"We are not interested in any manner or in any way to know the issues which are concerned about the security or the defence or any other national interest issue. We are only concerned, in the face of allegations that some software was used against some people, to know whether it was used by the government, by any method other than permissible under the law," the bench had said.

The Congress appreciated the SC's initiative. "The Pegasus spy scandal is... an assault on national security and privacy... The solution is simple — A SC-monitored full investigation. SC observation of setting up a technical committee is a right step in this direction," Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala tweeted.

BJP warming up to Captain ahead of Punjab polls

HARPREET BAJWA @ Chandigarh

A day after former Punjab chief minister Capt Amarinder Singh chided the Gandhi siblings, Rahul and Priyanaka, for unseating him, the BJP seemed to be cosying up to the veteran leader.

With the political pot in poll-bound Punjab already boiling following his high-pitched spat with state Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu, the BJP's overture has added a new dimension to it. They have not only gone soft on him but are spinning him as a nationalist icon. Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij on Thursday sought to slam Sidhu, saying Amarinder was axed as he was a hurdle in installing pro-Pakistan forces in power in Punjab.

The BJP, which had gone on the backfoot in the state after the Shiromani Akali Dal broke its alliance with it last year citing the controversial farm laws, is now tempting Amarinder to jump ship so that it can become a significant player in the state polls. As for Amarinder, he is keeping his options open. P10

Police personnel inspect the godown where an explosion occurred, killing two, at New Tharagupet, V V Puram, in Bengaluru on Thursday. Several two-wheelers were also damaged in the incident | VINOD KUMAR T

POWERFUL CRACKER BLAST KILLS 2; GODOWN OWNER HELD

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

A powerful explosion, caused by improperly stacked cartons of firecrackers, killed two people on the spot and left six others with severe injuries at a godown in New Tharagupet, V V Puram, here around noon on Thursday.

So powerful was the blast that the bodies of the two were blown to bits and lay scattered. Two of the ten two-wheelers damaged in the incident were hurled into the air due to the impact. Some residents who experienced the blast and witnessed the two-wheelers being tossed into the air, ran from the scene in panic. Window panes of neighbouring buildings were also shattered and a couple of passersby too sustained injuries.

The incident occurred on the premises of Sri Pathrakali Lorry Services. The deceased have been identified as Aslam Pasha (41), the owner of a puncture shop next to the godown and a resident of Goripalya, and Manohar (26), a worker at the godown and a native of Hosur in Tamil Nadu. The condition of one of the injured, Ambu Swamy, is said to be serious while Manjunath, Ganapathi and James are recovering in a hospital, a senior police officer said. Ganapathi had come to collect a few firecracker cartons, but sustained minor burn injuries compared to the others.

Although it has been confirmed that at least two cartons filled with firecrackers exploded, the investigators are yet to ascertain what triggered the explosion. P2

> I was near the godown when the blast occurred. I was shocked by the intensity of the blast. The residents were screaming and crying.
>
> Suresh, an eyewitness

DRUG MONEY

Narco terrorism biggest global security challenge

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

NARCO-terrorism is emerging as the biggest threat to global security and the seizure of unprecedented quantities of high-quality contraband drugs over the last two years has sent shock waves among the law enforcement agencies.

"There's a steep spike in the quantities of contraband shipments since the outbreak of the pandemic last year. It is because of the disruption of supply lines after land routes were closed," said sources. Last year, Pakistan had closed three land routes with Afghanistan, which is the world's largest producer of heroin.

EXPRESS EXCLUSIVE

The haul of nearly 3,000 kg of heroin, worth over ₹21,000 crore, from Gujarat's Mundra port on September 15 by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) is said to be the "largest consignment of contraband heroin seized in the world," according to sources.

A look at the worldwide seizures of heroin this year confirms the claim. On February 23, 1,500 kg of heroin, with a street value of 45 million Euros, was seized at Rotterdam in the Netherlands by Customs officers in cooperation with the British National Crime Agency. The contraband was concealed in bags of Himalayan salt from Pakistan. This was the biggest seizure in the Western European country.

CONTINUED ON: P11

EXPRESS READ

Nod for health workers' third dose soon

BENGALURU: The much-awaited approval for the third vaccine shot against Covid-19 for healthcare workers, is likely to arrive in a week. According to sources, there has been an increase in the demand for booster doses by healthcare workers, who work in direct contact with Covid patients. "We have already submitted a proposal for the demand and are expecting to get an approval in the coming week," said a senior doctor from Private Hospitals And Nursing Homes Association (PHANA), requesting anonymity. P3

10-yr-old moves court against language policy

BENGALURU: A 10-year-old student from a Bengaluru-based leading ICSE school moved the Karnataka High Court, questioning the Kannada Language Learning Act, on the ground that it violates Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution. P2

WHITE TREASURE

Cotton farmers make rich pickings, potato growers in peril

K SHIVA KUMAR & B THIPPERUDRAPPA @ Mysuru, Chikkamagaluru

WHILE cotton growers in Karnataka are reaping a bounty, with the price of raw cotton soaring to a record high, potato and onion growers are in distress due to a huge slump in prices.

With the textile industry bouncing back, the price of raw cotton, which used to be in the range of ₹5,000-6,000 per quintal, has more than doubled to between ₹11,500 and ₹13,000 per quintal in different parts of the state. The minimum support price for the crop is ₹5,500 per quintal.

Women farmers harvest cotton at a farm near Dammanakatte village, H D Kote taluk, in Mysuru district | UDAYSHANKAR S

After a couple of lacklustre years, this season has been a blockbuster for cotton growers with agents and traders from neighbouring states making a beeline to villages in HD Kote, Saragur, Nanjangud, Hunsur and Gundlupet taluks in the Old Mysuru region where farmers are commanding the prices.

Most of the buyers are from Tamil Nadu as a majority of textile industries are situated in Tirupur and Erode where raw cotton is processed and the yarn exported to Bangladesh. Cotton trader Cheluvaraju said they have orders from dealers in Tamil Nadu and other states too. Villages in HD Kote region witness early monsoon and hence, sowing and harvest start early. Usually, about 47,000 hectares comes under cotton cultivation in the region, but it had dropped to about 30,000 hectares this season.

According to progressive farmer Kariyappa, the scanty rains and the truant monsoon in early April and May has had an impact on sowing activity, which has also contributed to the high demand for cotton. P7

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